"To be aglow with civic ardours": the "Godly Commonwealth" in Glasgow 1843-1914

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I

In his magisterial study of Thomas Chalmers, Stewart J. Brown concluded that "The Disruption represented the final failure of his godly commonwealth ideal." Brown regarded the Disruption not just as a "failure" for Chalmers, but "also a tragedy for organized religion in Scotland." For the rest of the nineteenth century, in Brown's view, Scottish religious life was dominated by a competition between the Establishment and the Dissenters which "thwarted the revival of any national feeling of Christian community". In common with some other commentators, Professor Brown has recently opined that the Disruption had more far-reaching consequences, constituting "a disruption in Scottish national identity", "a turning-away from the vision of the unified godly commonwealth", and an undermining of "the Presbyterian nationalism that had shaped early modern Scotland, with its ideal of the democratic intellect preserved in its parish schools, kirk sessions and presbyteries". A generation ago, Drummond and Bulloch were blunter: "Before the Disruption Scotland had a national history; afterwards she had not "3

The contemporary constitutional agenda of late twentieth-century Scotland has produced intense speculation on the link between the

S.J. Brown, Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland (Oxford, 1982), 373-4.

S.J. Brown, 'The Ten Years' Conflict and the Disruption of 1843', in Scotland in the Age of Disruption, edd. S.J. Brown and M. Fry (Edinburgh, 1993), 2.

A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874* (Edinburgh, 1975), 4.

Disruption and national identity. A key issue has been Professor Brown's transposition of Thomas Chalmers' loss of hope in realising the godly commonwealth into a general "turning-away" from this vision by Scottish Presbyterianism as a whole. A notion is gaining currency that after 1843 a void emerged amongst the schismatic Scottish churches in their aspirations for "a communal social ideal"; the vision of a spiritually-based "imagined community", whether of parish or of nation, was supposedly lost.

In one very straightforward way, the thrust of this argument presents an immediate difficulty. Chalmers' work was an inspiration to the presbyterian and evangelical churches of Scotland in the rest of the nineteenth century. The home-mission industry was a vast legacy to his ideals, inspired not by him alone admittedly, but based heavily on his crucial example and his writings. In this sense, the machinery of the urban godly commonwealth not only survived after 1843 and Chalmers' death in 1847, but mushroomed spectacularly into a vast enterprise. However, the blossoming of this machinery was not unaccompanied without change and development to the aspirational vision to which it was tied. The vision of a godly commonwealth did not wither. Indeed, the Disruption introduced an era of profound ecclesiastical idealism concerning a desirable urban-industrial society in which the key element was the city. Whilst the parish had been Chalmers' building-block for his communal social ideal, it was "the city of God" which was to be developed as a well-governed, sociallyharmonious and spiritually-enriched community.

A number of scholars have already contributed to this very different interpretation of post-Disruption presbyterian idealism for the Scottish "community". In the works of Bernard Aspinwall and Irene Maver, in particular, there are detailed explorations of presbyterian utopian idealism for the Victorian and Edwardian city in Scotland.⁵ The

This literature will be reviewed in C.G. Brown, "Religion and national identity in Scotland since the Union of 1707", in a forthcoming volume published by University of Lund Press.

B. Aspinwall, Portable Utopia: Glasgow and the United States 1820-1920 (Aberdeen, 1984); I. Maver (formerly Sweeney), "The Municipal Administration of

present paper seeks to develop upon this theme, positing that the godly commonwealth vision put forward by Chalmers was outdated, oligarchic, essentially anti-urban and unworkable, and that it was his successors – many openly dedicating their activities to his name and schema – who transformed it into a modernised, democratic, pro-urban and workable vision. In updating Chalmers' preferred system, the parish state-church was replaced by a multi-agency approach, with religious voluntary organisations working in tandem with municipal collectivist agencies to create a civic identity. In similar though not identical ways to Birmingham and other cities, Glasgow became after the Disruption the home of a "civic gospel" that had a profound influence in other Scottish towns and cities, and on the formation of new burghs. In the process, "civic patriotism" became vital to notions of identity in Scotland between 1843 and 1914.

П

What died on 18 May 1843 was not the godly commonwealth ideal as a whole, but a very particular, backward-looking version of it. In essence, Thomas Chalmers had tried to invoke a pre-industrial parochial system, rooted in rural village and in agriculture, in the amassed tenements, factories, docks and building sites of the industrial cities. Chalmers' experiments between the 1810s and 1840s at St John's Parish in Glasgow, the West Port and the Water of Leith in Edinburgh, and at St. Andrews⁶ were inspirational. Some elements – notably the poor relief system he tried out in Glasgow – were either not widely adopted or were superseded. But his schemes had the kernel of both objectives and organisation that were to spread in the Victorian home-mission industry: the "aggressive system" of home visitation, voluntary organisations for age-specific, sex-specific and occupation-

Glasgow, 1833-1912: Public service and the Scottish civic identity", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1990.

R.A. Cage and O. Checkland, "Thomas Chalmers and urban poverty: The St John's Parish Experiment in Glasgow, 1819-1837", *Philosophical Journal* 13 (1976); S.J. Brown, "The Disruption and urban poverty: Thomas Chalmers and the West Port Operation in Edinburgh, 1844-47", *ante*, xx (1978).

specific evangelisation, and the small-district system, or the "principle of locality", which continued to inspire churchmen until the 1910s.

But crucial aspects of his vision were out of date before he even started. The monopoly of the Established Church, which lay at the heart of his pre-industrial-style communal social ideal, was already crumbling when he arrived in Glasgow in 1814. The meteoric growth of other churches, principally the Relief and Secession churches, meant that by 1824 the Church of Scotland accounted for only 42 per cent of the church sittings in the city and its suburbs, and twelve years later only 41 per cent of Glasgow churchgoers attended the Church of Scotland. At the same time, the increase of population density in Glasgow (as in other cities) in the 1820s and 1830s destroyed the last vestiges of the traditional parish system; one church society commented in 1835:

It is to be lamented that, from the large size to which Parishes have grown, we cannot now *observe* the Parochial System working, nor be sensible of ourselves or our families receiving benefit from the machinery it should employ – a Church and Pastor, Elders and Deacons, Schools and Teachers, placed over a small manageable number of people.⁸

Religious monopoly and the civil parish-state were already long dead in the city when the Disruption occurred. By 1851, a mere 20 per cent of churchgoers still attended the Church of Scotland in the city. Even when Chalmers arrived in 1819 at St. John's Parish in the east end of Glasgow, a mere 26 per cent of church seat-holders attended the Church of Scotland. The city was alive with religious dissent. His

Brownfield Church Society, An Address ... on erecting Brownfield into a new Parish (Glasgow, 1835), 3.

Calculated from J. Cleland, *The Rise and Progress of the City of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1824), 12-23; and Royal Commission on Religious Instruction, *PP* (1837), xxx, 12-13, and (1837-8), xxxii, 13.

Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship and Education, Scotland, PP (1854), lix.

Figure calculated from data in R.A. Cage and E.O.A. Checkland, "Thomas Chalmers", 42.

dream of Established Church monopoly was backward looking, rooted in the village and agricultural Scotland in which he and most Scotlish clergy of the nineteenth-century had been raised. But even in the countryside, his ideal was of diminishing relevance. The one-parish, one-church, one-community ideal was inoperative in the hundreds of villages where industrialisation and presbyterian dissent had taken root simultaneously from the 1770s or before.¹¹

It was thus ironic that Chalmers should be taken as the great theoretician of the urban church, for he was not of the new world of urbanism. He was the arch theoretician of ecclesiastical anti-urbanism, and a key promulgator of the Victorian discourse on the irreligious "mighty mass of a city population". In cities, he wrote in 1821, "the population have so far outgrown the old ecclesiastical system, as to have accumulated there into so many masses of practical heanthenism". Tour years earlier, he had feared that "if something be not done to bring this enormous physical strength under the control of christian and humanized principle, the day may yet come when it may lift against the authorities of the land its brawny vigour, and discharge upon them all the turbulence of its rude and volcanic energy." It was this discourse on the industrial city and its social and religious breakdown that lay at the root of Chalmers' popularity.

It is further ironic that such an establishment figure as Chalmers – high Tory, paternalist, suspicious of individualism, and a supporter of a monopolistic Established Church with control of civil agencies of welfare and education – should come to attract after his death the idolisation of the Liberal, evangelical dissenter. For the latter was a patron of independent religious charities and organisations of every hue, an opponent of Established Church control of education, poor relief and other welfare agencies, a supporter of municipal intervention in the control of the built environment, and who yet sought down to the

See for example C.G. Brown, "The religion of an industrial village: the churches in Balfron 1789-1850", Scottish Local History Journal, 35 (1995), 9-15.

T. Chalmers, quoted in C.G. Brown, "Religion in the city", *History Today*, 40 (May, 1990), 41.

Quoted in R. Buchanan, The Schoolmaster in the Wynds (Glasgow, 1850), 4.

First World War to create this new civil society in his, Chalmers', name. The solution lies in the fact that those who continued to work and uphold his name for many decades after 1847 were in fact changing and modernising his godly commonwealth ideal. For one thing, they moved from his instinctive Toryism to, almost without exception, a Liberal disposition in politics and economics. For another thing, they moved from a monopolistic communal social ideal of the state church into a religiously-pluralist and democratic "city of God" vision of modern church operations. And where he was suspicious of government intervention, they became supreme advocates of the role of collectivism in municipal improvement.

Ш

There was already an urban version of the godly commonwealth for Chalmers - and his successors - to build on. In the Scottish preindustrial burgh the agencies of the rural parish had been adapted in the early-modern period to the urban location. As in Glasgow's case, the early-modern single-parish burgh had been divided into smaller parishes each with a parish church; Glasgow parish had six churches in 1700. The work of individual kirk sessions was assisted by a general session providing a burgh-wide co-ordination of poor relief and some other functions. And - perhaps crucially - the town council of the royal burgh were the heritors, 14 owning and providing the churches, selecting and paying the ministers, beadles and precentors. In Glasgow, the corporation's "Ecclesiastical Department" was a major undertaking for the city chamberlain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and through the council's committee on churches and churchyards the civil magistrate had a pro-active role in educational, charitable and poorrelief operations of the kirk. It should not be forgotten that, whilst in Glasgow, Chalmers was an employee of the corporation.

If an urban machinery for a godly commonwealth already existed, why did it not work as Chalmers hoped? The parish churches of

Excluding the High Church (the Cathedral building and one of the three congregations that met there) for which the Crown was patron.

Glasgow had been managed by the town council and general session in the eighteenth century to create a sense of a unified society. But this broke down after the 1770s with rapid urban growth, the rise of dissent, the council's failure to build new churches, the Church of Scotland's hostility to the new machinery of urban religion (such as Sunday schools), and the conversion of the pew-renting system from a device ensuring church access to all social groups into a free-market machinery of social exclusivity. The poor-relief, education and parish-visitation systems in the city were each by the 1840s an inadequate shambles. The machinery of the urban kirk had developed as an arm of civic government; when it disintegrated, civic government itself was left bereft of both the agencies and the ideal for which they had been developed.

ΓV

The modernisation of the godly commonwealth in Glasgow pre-dated the Disruption. It started in November 1833 when the first council was elected under the Burgh (Scotland) Act of that year. The reformed town council broke the previous monopoly on membership and voting enjoyed by the Merchants and Trades Houses of the city, and introduced a new agenda brought by evangelicals of both Established Church and presbyterian dissent. An immediate development from 1833 was the reduction of the work of the ecclesiastical department which supported the ten parish churches owned by the council, and the ending of support for other voluntary religious activities. Indeed, Church of Scotland evangelical councillors united with dissenting councillors in trying to undermine the ecclesiastical department's work, and even to abolish it. Seven of the twelve subscribers of William Collins' church-extension society for the city, inspired by Thomas Chalmers, were town councillors, and they blamed the council churches' policy of high seat rents for alienating the working classes. They stated:

C.G. Brown, "The costs of pew-renting: church management, churchgoing and social class in nineteenth-century Glasgow" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 38 (1987); C.G. Brown, "The Sunday-school movement in Scotland", ante, xxi (1981).

It is our settled conviction, that high seat rents have had a most adverse influence on the Christianity of the people, and have operated as a powerful check to their church-going habits.... [T]he end of an Endowed or Established Church is to provide, at the expense of the wealthier classes, church accommodation and pastoral superintendance for those who cannot, or will not, provide it for themselves.

The church planting scheme for twenty new churches was openly intended "to lay the city rulers under the necessity of lowering the seat rents of the present churches, in order to meet the competition". The twelve men who wrote this, and who paid for the scheme, were Thomas Chalmers' closest Glasgow followers. They included William Collins, David Stow, and seven non-intrusionist town councillors. These men were Chalmers' faithful, hoping to create "the subdivision of the city into small parishes" and the introduction of parish schools into Glasgow. Yet, they were openly seeking to undermine the operation of the Establishment in the city. During the Ten Years' Conflict, they united with dissenting councillors to annoy the Moderates in the city's parish churches, and on the presbytery, in every way they could.

With the Disruption, the ecclesiastical department became the black sheep of council administration. Seven of the ten Council-employed ministers seceded, and most of the elders and some three thousand seatholders, mostly wealthier members, left. The post-Disruption town council, dominated by Free and U.P. churchmen, tried to abolish or reduce the ecclesiastical department and its ten churches, but lost after

Proposal for Building Twenty New Parochial Churches in the City and Suburbs of Glasgow (Glasgow, n.d but 1834), 4, 8.

The town councillors were Henry Dunlop, Lord Provost 1837-40, John Alston, former Lord Provost, John Leadbetter, a leading evangelical opponent of Sunday trains, Hugh Tennant, John Sommerville, Richard Kidston (father of a future leader of the Free Church's teetotal cause) and Henry Paul.

C.G. Brown, "The costs of pew-renting"; and C.G. Brown, "Religion and the development of an urban society: Glasgow 1780-1914", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 1982, vol. 1, 218-231.

a long succession of cases in the courts ¹⁹ The town council, the proprietor and heritor of the Church of Scotland in the city, was left with the ruins of the parish-welfare system and the resulting social chaos. A Church of Scotland bailie told the council in November 1843:

With dislocated sessions, the spiritual and physical wants of the Poor cannot receive the same attention, the seceding Elders having almost altogether abandoned their former charge and the new churches having been erected far from the chief abodes of the Poor of the City.... [M]uch of the education machinery established and supported by the Sessions and Congregations for the education of the Poorer Classes is in danger of being broken up, and Societies connected with the Congregation formed for the clothing [of] the Poor in Winter have not been reorganised.²⁰

The city's poor relief system was in chaos with the vast bulk of the city's poor-relief contributors, and its recipients, being outwith the Church of Scotland which ran it. The royal burgh's ecclesiastical department, and the pre-industrial godly-commonwealth ideal which underpinned both it and Chalmers' vision, were now in shreds.

V

The Disruption of 18 May 1843 killed one dream, but it created another. From the rubble the evangelicals of both Free Church and United Presbyterian Church had a new, evangelical agenda. The Disruption was the cue for the rise of a new vision of a godly urban society. The vision had two organisational elements to it. Firstly, the development of a town-council role as moral arbiter of the behaviour of its citizens, and secondly the growth of evangelical agencies for the moral and religious improvement of the people – principally those who were regarded as the "unchurched" working classes.

S[trathclyde] R[egional] A[rchives], c1.1.63/4, c1.2.21, Glasgow town council minutes, 2 and 17 November and 7 December 1843, 9 May 1844, 3 September 1846.

Bailie James Bogle quoted in SRA., c1.1.63,minutes of Glasgow Town Council, 17 November 1843.

The story of the second of these, the growth of evangelical agencies in Glasgow, is a long and complex one.²¹ It was based on the city-wide application of what many attributed as Chalmers' "aggressive system" of home and street evangelisation using overlapping agencies, a system that came to its peak in the era of Moody-Sankey revivalism between the mid 1870s and mid 1890s. It depended for its operation on the dedicated work of the lay volunteer – the educational charity promoter, the tract distributor, the home visitor, the penny-bank operator, the youth movement leader and the 10,766 Sunday-school teachers that operated in Glasgow in 1895.²² The system, however, entered a crisis in the 1890s; with middle-class suburbanisation, there was a loss of volunteers; with the rise of the labour movement, there was a decline in proletarian receptivity to the bourgeois evangeliser. Left to professional home missionaries, bible women and teetotal campaigners, the homemission industry was in marked decline in the two decades before 1914.

The great evangelisation scheme of Victorian Glasgow was linked to the creation of a "city of God" through the ballot box. The basis of municipal work was the town council, and it formed the core of evangelical attempts to reform Victorian urban society. Its work covered both material improvement and behavioural control of the citizens. One major area was the drinks laws which evangelical organisations and the churches continuously pushed the town council to tighten. In 1838, the council noted an alarming increase in drunkenness and drink-related crimes, especially on Sundays, and after lobbying from evangelical organisations and shopkeepers, a report was produced by an evangelical group of councillors which set the council's drinks agenda for the rest of the century: the closure of pubs on Sundays, reduction in the number of pubs, early closing hours, and easier public objection to the granting of licences.²³ The first major attempt to implement this came in 1845 when the Rev. Robert Buchanan of the

It is told in a fuller exposition in C.G. Brown, "Religion and the development of an urban society".

Glasgow Sabbath School Union, Annual Report, 1896.

SRA, c1.1.62, Glasgow Town Council minutes, 19 September 1839 and 9 January 1840.

Free Tron Church, together with his elders, deacons and Sunday-school teachers, obtained the council's agreement to limit the number of licensed premises in the Tron area "to promote the moral and religious welfare of the Inhabitants of the Parish"; to the infuriation of both council and evangelicals, however, the county justices of the peace overturned most of the decisions of the magistrates to refuse licences, leading to a prolonged campaign by the council, along with other Scottish councils, to reduce the powers of justices of the peace in favour of burgh licensing courts.24 Buchanan inspired a further and more successful evangelical campaign against the licensing system in 1850 when the Glasgow Sabbath School Union, dominated by presbyterian evangelicals, orchestrated a mass lobby of the council involving more than sixty memorials from evangelical church organisations.25 The result was a series of local byelaws of immense importance to Scottish drinking law for the ensuing century and a half. These closed public houses on Sundays, banned the consumption of alcohol on the premises of licensed grocers (thus creating the "offlicence"), and introduced the first age restriction of fourteen years on purchasers of alcohol. These became the model for the Public Houses (Scotland) Act of 1853 which extended these restrictions throughout Scotland, and which were to be copied in England in the 1870s. Following on from this, the role of the Free Church in the teetotal cause was to increase. An influential speech in 1857 by Professor John Miller, convener of the Free Church General Assembly's temperance committee, turned the church overwhelmingly behind the teetotal cause. Miller in particular took up the cudgels of the Scottish town councils' attack on the powers of the county justices of the peace in overturning the decisions of burgh licensing courts; he told the General Assembly "that it was the business of Christian Churches to see that magisterial

SRA, c.1.162, Glasgow Town Council minutes, 21 August and 2 October 1845; Report from the Select Committee on Public Houses, Scotland, *PP* 1846, 27-9, paras 403-414.

Glasgow Herald, 26 April 1850; SRA, Glasgow Town Council, c.1.1.65, minutes 7 and 28 March and 25 April 1850; Scottish National Sabbath School Union, Annual Report, 1905, 21.

situations were not allowed to go a-begging, but filled by men of the right sort, fearing God as well as honouring the Queen."²⁶ From that point forward, the Free Church was the dominating denomination amongst the agencies and campaigns of the Scottish teetotal movements.

In Glasgow, the teetotal and prohibition movements remained extremely influential on the town council; many councillors after the 1850s were teetotallers, and several lords provost - notably Free churchmen Sir William Collins junior and Sir Samuel Chisholm made attacking the drinks trade the hallmark of their periods of office.²⁷ By the 1900s Glasgow town council was notorious in the licensed trade as the most hostile of Scottish local authorities; 28 it was also noted by the art world, which had to suffer the magistrates censoring of art exhibitions in the city, leading to one contemporary academic's comment that Glasgow's magistrates used their powers "in a narrow and puritanical manner". 29 The temperance cause was an important aspect of the design for the ideal urban community of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the dominance of teetotallers on the Glasgow licensing court by the 1900s – mostly from the Free and U.P. traditions - was a mark of the success in uniting evangelicalism with municipal business.

It would be a mistake to assume that the evangelical influence on municipal administration after 1843 was merely in regard to puritan issues. Evangelical councillors – predominantly of the Free and U.P. Churches, but including a few key colleagues who remained in the Church of Scotland – were at the forefront of promoting schemes for municipal improvement of the built environment. The issues of sanitary improvement (principally water supply, sewage disposal, street cleansing and personal hygiene) and of housing improvement

Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church, 1857, 273.

I. Maver, "The municipal administration of Glasgow", 587-682.

A. Campbell, The Licensing (Scotland) Act, 1903, with introduction and commentary (Glasgow, 1903), 19-23; Court of Session Cases, 1909, Goodall v Bilsland and other Members of the Licensing Appeal Court at Glasgow, 1152.

M. Atkinson, Local Government in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1904), 50.

dominated concerns from the 1840s to the 1910s. In the 1840s, a number of key evangelicals initiated private philanthropic schemes, some with Corporation involvement. With the backing of local evangelical newspapers such as the *Glasgow Examiner*³⁰ and the *North British Daily Mail*³¹, a wide-ranging and very powerful social-reform movement developed amongst evangelical councillors. There were three key figures: the Rev. Robert Buchanan of the Free Tron Church, John Blackie junior of the Free Church publishing family, and James Watson, a stockbroker and member of the Church of Scotland. These three men were close friends from the 1840s onwards, and through the network of councillors, businessmen, temperance reformers, Sunday-school teachers, clergymen and home missionaries collected around them, they formed the core of the Glasgow civic gospel of social and moral improvement from the Disruption to the mid 1870s.

The mixing of philanthropic with municipal action was the key to the work of this civic gospel. Working to the *Glasgow Examiner's* axiom that "To give a man a comfortable dwelling and a clean face, is to start him on the path of intellectual and moral improvement", ³² a series of schemes emerged in the 1840s: a model-lodging housing charity founded in 1845 by Blackie, Watson and a third councillor (all future Lord Provosts), seven slum-clearance companies, and the formation of the Glasgow Sanitary Association. ³³ In 1851, Kelvingrove Park was initiated with the key support within the council of William Bankier, a U.P. evangelical, who insisted that in return for the council's ten per cent funding of the proposal there should be free entry for the

Founded in 1844 by a congregationalist minister, the Rev. John Smith.

Edited by George Troup, a close friend of Rev. Robert Buchanan and an elder at the latter's Free Tron Church.

Glasgow Examiner, 19 December 1846.

SRA, c.1.2.21, Glasgow Town Council minutes, 11 September and 2 October 1845, 23 April 1846. *Glasgow Examiner*, 6, 13 and 20 September 1845, and 18 April 1846; S.E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Sir. Edwin Chadwick* (London, 1952), 240-1.

working classes on certain days of the week. ³⁴ Of even greater, and certainly more symbolic importance was the Loch Katrine water scheme initiated in 1853 and completed in the 1860s. First mooted in 1844, the cholera epidemic 1848 spurred action, and the municipal take-over of the water companies and the initiation of the Katrine scheme was negotiated through the council by Lord Provost James Anderson, a prominent U.P. evangelical. In 1858, a ratepayers' revolt against the cost of the scheme, which had yet to produced any water in the city, led to Robert Buchanan persuading the Free Church presbytery of Glasgow to set up a housing committee, with himself as convener, to provide backing to the council. ³⁵ At the opening ceremony, Buchanan gave the "proposal" (the teetotal equivalent of the toast), and said of the project:

The very conception was magnificent, and its successful execution is one of the not least illustrious achievements of our age.... At least there can be no doubt that filth is a great enemy and hindrance to godliness. To live in it, is almost inevitably to lose that self-respect which lies at the bottom of all moral and social progress.

To the stream of water from Loch Katrine, he said, had to be added another:

The stream of which I speak is the gospel. Let that living water be made to circulate through all the dwellings of the city.... In regard to all wise and well-directed efforts for the amelioration of those physical evils which abound in this city, I have nothing to say but this, and I say it with all my heart, "These things ought ye to do." If they have not been done before, do them vigorously now; and

SRA, c.1.1.65, c1.1.24/25, Glasgow Town Council minutes, 7 June 1849, 20 February and 13 March 1851, 14 April 1853. See also I. Maver, "The Municipal Administration of Glasgow", 256-69.

³⁵ SRO, CH3/146/36, Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow, minutes, 7 October 1859.

therefore I say, my Lord Provost, God-speed to your new Police Bill, with its sanitary improvements....³⁶

This was no mere idle articulation of evangelical support for the mundane aspects of urban improvement. Dr Robert Buchanan was the key inspiration to the mid-Victorian civic gospel in Glasgow. He was a close friend of key evangelical councillors, and notably of John Blackie and James Watson. Buchanan was widely acknowledged to have inherited the mantle of Thomas Chalmers after the latter's death, with his charge at the Tron Church giving him a direct link to Chalmers' work in that parish, and during his time at the Free Tron Church he oversaw and inspired a battery of social-reform activities: he along with James Watson ran an ad hoc Relief Committee which distributed funds to victims of the potato famine arriving in the city;³⁷ he triggered the Free Church general assembly in 1850 to commence educational evangelisation of city centres in the name of Chalmers; and he inspired a member of his congregation, George Troup, the editor of the campaigning evangelical organ the North British Daily Mail, to write many articles urging municipal action on slum housing.³⁸ Another development from his work at the Wynd Mission was the use by the Corporation between 1866 and 1869 of Sunday-school teachers and home-mission visitors in a large-scale system for distributing municipal advice on personal hygiene during cholera and typhus epidemics.³⁹

Most spectacularly of all, Buchanan may be attributed with inspiring the beginnings of mass-scale slum clearance in Britain. His Free Tron Church established the Wynd Mission in the late 1840s which attracted the interest of his friend James Watson. Watson

Quoted in N.L. Walker, Robert Buchanan D.D. An Ecclesiastical Biography (London, Edinburgh and Glasgow, 1877), 511-513.

N.L. Walker, Robert Buchanan, 506-7.

G.E. Troup, Life of George Troup, Journalist (Edinburgh, 1881), 66-78, 82.

Glasgow Herald, 4, 13 and 25 Sept. and 2 Oct. 1866, 2 Jan. 1867; North British Daily Mail, 15 Nov. 1869 and 13 Jan 1870; A.N. Somerville, Precious Seed Sown in Many Lands (London, 1890), xv-xvi; G.F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte (London, 1923), 131-2; F. Balfour, Life and Letters of the Revd James MacGregor (London, 1912), 173.

befriended Buchanan's lay missionary, James Hogg, and learnt from him of the difficulties in improving the condition of those who lived in the slums of central Glasgow. Hogg persuaded Buchanan and Watson that the only method by which the slums could be transformed was by a long-term programme of discreet purchasing of slum tenements, thus preventing property prices from soaring, followed by demolition and rebuilding of "model" dwellings with improved sanitary design, spacious houses and reduced densities. 40 During the 1850s, there was real hope that the town council could undertake this work directly, and this seems to have been the idea behind Robert Buchanan's formation of the Free Church presbytery housing committee in 1858. However, the ratepayers' reaction to the cost of the Katrine project put any further ideas for municipal expenditure out of action. Then, in 1860, Watson laid out the need for slum clearance in a speech to Social Science Association, 41 and in the following year he formed a copartnery of twenty-two wealthy businessmen and industrialists who set about the purchase of nearly every tenement property within a quarter mile of Glasgow Cross. 42 Starting with the Tontine Close at the heart of the city's slums, a total of thirty-three properties (each varying from a single to a group of tenements) was bought between 1861 and 1866, costing a minimum of £60,000 obtained through loans from the Clydesdale Bank and secured by the members of the co-partnery. This philanthropic group was by 1866 probably the largest slum landowner

⁴⁰ G.E. Troup, *George Troup*, **79-80**, 108, 116; N.L. Walker, *Robert Buchanan*, 306-8.

His speech was published in a little-distributed pamphlet, J. Watson, On the measures required for improving the low parts of the city (Glasgow, 1860).

The description of the Watson philanthropic group that follows is based on G.E. Troup, George Troup, 79-80; a speech by Watson to the town council, reported in Glasgow Herald 22 December 1865; and articles in Glasgow Herald 4 and 7 October 1872, and the North British Daily Mail 3, 4, 5 and 26 October 1872. Other scholars to have unearthed parts of this complex story are 1.G.C. Hutchison, "Politics and society in mid-Victorian Glasgow, 1846-1886", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh 1974, 165-6, 202-3; H.W. Bull, "Working-class housing in Glasgow 1862-1902", unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Strathleyde, 1973, 43-4, 109; and 1. Maver, "Municipal administration" 294-330.

in Glasgow, if not in Britain. The venture became so expensive, however, that they could not afford to demolish and replace the slums. Fortuitously, the 1865 cholera epidemic put the ratepayers in a mind for undertaking further civic improvement, and it was at this juncture that those members of the philanthropic group who were councillors, led by Lord Provost John Blackie, pushed through the council and Parliament the City Improvement (Glasgow) Act of 1866. This enabled the Council, acting as the City Improvement Trust, to compulsorily purchase prescribed properties in the centre of Glasgow and the Gorbals. In reality, the bulk of the properties purchased were already owned by the philanthropic co-partnery.

The City Improvement Act of 1866 was a milestone in the development of slum-clearance in Britain. It served to inspire national legislation in the following year, and was later copied in Birmingham and other cities. In Glasgow, it led to the complete demolition of central Glasgow, leaving only four substantive mediaeval buildings. In their place, the council built from 1886 onwards the first council houses of model tenement flats. This massive work set the agenda for Scottish municipal authorities for a century, prioritising improvement in the housing stock through state public intervention.

However, evangelical association with slum demolition became controversial soon after the work commenced in the late 1860s. Firstly, John Blackie lost his council seat because of a ratepayers' reaction to the cost of the 1866 Act. Secondly, and more seriously, the always fractious evangelical community in Glasgow split into opposing camps in 1872 when the *North British Daily Mail* discovered the existence of Watson's secret slum-buying group of the previous decade, and proceeded to accuse Watson – then Lord Provost – of corruption. Though this accusation was proved untrue by a successful defamation action brought by Watson in the Court of Session, ⁴³ it effectively brought to an end the first major phase of the civic gospel in the city. For, the scandal of 1872 left the work of evangelical-inspired civic improvement in something of a bad name in Glasgow. The corruption allegations over slum-clearance (and simultaneous suggestions of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 325-6.

corruption in relation to the construction of Glasgow's railways stations⁴⁴) made the cause difficult to pursue. At the same time, the mood of the evangelical community in the city – as in Britain as a whole – was being changed by the revivalist and militant-teetotal outlook partly promoted by the popularity of Moody and Sankey, who first became internationally renown during their spell in Glasgow in April 1874. For much of the 1870s and 1880s, new initiatives of civic improvement were on hold, and instrumental in this was the evangelical turning-away from structural urban improvement in favour of revivalist conversion and the taking of the pledge as the routes to social salvation.

VI

However, the early 1870s also marked a positive development for the modernisation of the godly commonwealth. In April 1873, school boards came into being under the Education (Scotland) Act of the previous year, and Glasgow school board (along with those for Govan and most other places in Scotland) became dominated by clergy and laity of the Free, U.P. and Established churches who had been raised in the long shadow of the Chalmerian era.45 An important figure in Glasgow was Michael Connal (1817-1893) who saw the work of the school board as the implementation of Chalmers' godly commonwealth. In 1848 he had founded the Spoutmouth Bible Institute in the east end of the city to attract the lads he had seen rioting in the Spring of that year as he stood with Glasgow Sharpshooters in defending the city from the threat of revolution. During the 1850s and 1860s he played an active part in promoting educational evangelisation schemes. He was inspired by Chalmers from early on; in 1840, he heard Chalmers at the British Association, and wrote in his diary:

After one speaker had sat down Dr Chalmers rose, and from twelve o'clock till a quarter to four he occupied the attention of his

J.R. Kellett, The Impact of the Railways on Victorian Cities (London and Toronto, 1969), 115-118.

See C.G. Brown, "Religion and the development of an urban society", vol. 2, 93-142.

audience in a most lucid statement on the resources within – or *ab* intra – every parish to support its own poor... He showed that there was a sympathy among the poorer classes which had only to be cultivated to supply the deserving with the means of sustenance, and that when the parish interfered it should be only to assist and not support the paupers... Dr Chalmers is a man of vast capacity. I felt painfully convinced how little I was putting forth of that which was within me. Though it be little and little, yet I must put forth all my mind and soul and strength to glorify God. The Lord give me wisdom and grace – grace to seek to live to it; wisdom how to live it. Amen. 46

Throughout his diary, Connal talks about his educational work - both charitable and for the state education system - with references to Chalmers. He and his evangelical colleagues were convinced that the school board system of compulsory education was the way at last to implement Chalmers' desire of introducing the parish-school system to royal burghs (from which it had always been excluded). Connal served a term as Chairman of the School Board, and was instrumental along with a number of other evangelicals in implementing the state-school system in Glasgow. The system was modelled as closely as possible on the principles laid down by Chalmers - notably, the payment by parents for the schooling of their children, a principle that had existed at the heart of the parish schools of rural areas. But by the 1890s, there was much in the progress of the evangelical movement which depressed him as he saw innovations (such as the Salvation Army) overtaking Chalmers' scheme, and at meetings of Free Church and charity organisations he often, by his own account, "spoke decidedly about Dr Chalmers' scheme as the best". When in 1893 the abolition of feepaying at state schools was being demanded by the Scottish Education Department and by the Labour and Christian socialist members of the School Board, he saw the end to a key Chalmerian principle; he wrote as almost the last entry in his diary: "Came home yesterday sad at heart. The Board decided by ten to three to free the schools [from fees]

Diary of Sir Michael Connal, ed. J.C. Gibson (Glasgow, 1895), 31.

after 15th August... I hoped that they would accept my resignation as Convener of Finance Committee." ⁴⁷ In this way, hard-core Chalmerian supporters were able to sustain key principles of his godly-commonwealth vision, with little substantive change, down to almost the end of the century. In this respect, the school board system was certainly not a "secularisation" of education, but the realisation of an acceptable, democratically-controlled version of the system imagined by early nineteenth-century evangelicals.

But in other spheres the civic gospel of a godly commonwealth moved onto a more modernised urban agenda - especially from the late 1880s. This was marked symbolically by Queen Victoria laying the foundation stone in 1888 for the grand new City Chambers in George Square. From this point, the articulation of the civic gospel became much more vibrant, with a coherent and rousing ideology of civic pride, and with a changed agenda of methods for urban improvement. In particular, this was the period in which the civic gospel became strongly connected with apolitical Christian socialism, whereby civic improvement became engrossed in what was perceived as the ethicallybased Labour Movement. The period from 1888 until 1914 was the heyday of municipal collectivism, and Glasgow was one of the great exemplars in the English-speaking world. The city became a model of how to take-over private utility companies and to run them profitably under municipal management for the social benefit of the city as a whole. The range of ventures into which Glasgow corporation moved is legion. Most famous was the take-over of the trams, municipalised in 1894 after a high profile strike of railway servants against low pay during which considerable middle-class sympathy for the strikers was aroused. 48 The corporation then commenced the construction of the underground metro system, creating what was regarded as a hightechnology and efficient urban transit system to which urban politicians and administrators from as far as the United States came to inspect. The corporation in these years moved into the provision of public

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 313, 354.

B. Aspinwall, "Glasgow trams and American politics 1894-1914", Scottish Historical Review (1977), 64-66.

housing on a large scale, creating in excess of 3,000 council houses by 1914. For moral elevation, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was built, the public library service started, and international exhibitions were held in 1888, 1901 and 1911. The corporation moved further in the late 1880s into the provision of "rational recreation" with a highly successful scheme of drink-free alternatives to the music hall, the "Penny Concerts"; in the 1899 season these were attended by 216,161 people at five venues in the city, at which a more refined and restrained atmosphere attracted "the fair sex in large numbers ... for the reason that they can go unprotected". ⁴⁹ Indeed, the corporation's programme of public-hall construction in the late nineteenth century created a series of venues which were dominated by religious and temperance organisations, including the Glasgow Abstainers' Union which held Saturday night concerts of sacred song in the City Halls without a break from 1854 to 1914. ⁵⁰

Simultaneously to this explosion of civic pride was the re-drafting of the ideology of the civic gospel. In 1888 the "Established Church Presbytery Commission into the Housing of the Poor in Relation to Social Class" was formed in Glasgow, bringing prominence to a new breed of Established Church clergy including John Marshall Lang, Donald Macleod and David Watson, and a number of leading lay figures headed by William Smart, the first professor of Economics at the University of Glasgow. William Smart (1853-1915) was the great catalyst to the municipal ideal in late Victorian Glasgow, and he was extremely influential in the presbyterian churches who sought out his advice on many social-reform issues. In addition to instigating the presbytery housing commission of 1888-91, he promoted the corporation's own commission into housing of 1902-4⁵¹, and later went onto serve on the national Poor Law Commission. The Presbytery's report, inspired and to a great extent written by Smart, shot the Church

⁴⁹ North British Daily Mail, 6 January 1900.

E. King, "Popular Culture in Glasgow", in *The Working Class in Glasgow* 1750-1914, ed. R.A. Cage (London, 1987), 163.

Glasgow Municipal Commission on the Housing of the Poor, vol. 1, Minutes of Evidence (Glasgow, 1903), and vol. 2, Report (Glasgow, 1904)

of Scotland into the mainstream of social-reform development in a way it had not held since the Disruption. 52 Arising out of the work of the commission, Lang went onto to chair the General Assembly "Commission into the Religious Condition of the People" which sat between 1889 and 1896, and which broadcast a typical Christian-socialist message of the period. The final report of the commission said of class inequality: "For the Christian conscience has been aroused; and all persons, with some sense of justice as well as generosity, feel that the chasms between wealth-land and woe-land are a symptom of social unrighteousness." A further product of the Glasgow presbytery housing commission was the Glasgow Social Union, formed in 1890, which undertook a wide range of activities including the formation of the Glasgow Workmen's Dwellings Company (which went on to build several hundred model dwellings in the city, social centres, and a scheme for the artistic beautification of the city). 54

This ethical re-consideration of urban social issues was accelerated by the London dock strike of 1889 which spread north to Glasgow and other ports, and which aroused strong sympathy for the strikers. As A.S. Matheson, minister at Claremont U.P. Church in Glasgow, wrote: "Who were the spokesmen of these miserable dockmen in making a righteous demand? Not the ministers of Jesus Christ; not the magnates of the religious world; but a few socialists who, amid the starving multitudes, kept themselves and the suffered in such moderation and self-control as to be the admiration of the world." Though this passionate support of strike action was less acceptable to many other churchmen, it did symbolise the widespread concern of the clergy that the churches were now taking little part in the advance of social policy.

SRO, CH2/171/12, Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow, minutes 28 March 1888; Report of the Commission on the Housing of the Poor in Relation to Social Class (Glasgow, 1891); Glasgow Evening Times, 23 January and 1 February 1890.

Reports of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1896, Commission on the Religious Condition of the People, Final Report, 806-7.

Glasgow Social Union, Annual Reports, 1891, 1893.

A.S. Matheson, The Gospel and Modern Substitutes (Edinburgh, 1890), 176-7.

Indeed, many clergy spoke very sympathetically of the labour movement, and became closely involved with labour activities in the Scottish TUC, the Women's Provident and Protective League, and in various campaigns for municipal action on poverty and housing. A.S. Matheson was a devotee of the garden-city ideal expounded by Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes. In a book published in 1893 he first spoke about "The City of God" as an operating scheme for the modern church, ⁵⁶ and then in 1910 went on to issue a book entitled The City of Man in the famous Unwin series on town planning. Matheson attended many of the conferences connected with the planning and construction of Britain's first garden city at Letchworth. His objective was "an application of the Christian ideal of a city to the city." He wrote that "the city is the highest form in which the hierarchy of mutual fellowship and service can be manifested". His vision was for the churches and society "to be alit with civic ideals, to be alive with civic ardours, to be aglow with civic pride and patriotism." His practical faith was in the strength and democratic foundations of local elected bodies - school boards, councils and parochial boards. He specifically considered the city "more important" than the British Empire, and he noted with bursting pride that Glasgow was the basis of much American discussion on municipal utilities (especially the tramways); "the Corporation of Glasgow", he added, "is now the Mecca of the municipal reformer".57

David Watson, minister of St Clement's Church of Scotland in Glasgow, was more influential than Matheson, especially through his work on the Scottish Council for Women's Trades and in setting up the Scottish Christian Social Union which he founded and led. These two organisations worked closely with the social unions of Glasgow and Dundee, and with clergy and leading town councillors, in the development of sociological studies of children, women's work and various aspects of social life. At St Clement's, Watson pioneered the

A.S. Matheson, *The Church and Social Problems* (Edinburgh and London, 1893), 345ff.

A.S. Matheson, *The City of Man* (London and Leipsig), 4a-c, 51, 54, 143, 196, 199, 258.

social-service approach to pastoral work that was to update both Chalmers' pastoral-superintendence approach and the revivalists' evangelisation approach. He started there in the 1880s with lay helpers that included the three daughters of James Watson, and developed social-service organisations – including crèches for millgirls' children – that were to spread later under the aegis of the SCWT and the SCSU. Watson saw the city and civic service as the way forward for social policy. He wrote:

The Christianity of the city is the Church's business, and she can only do so through her members, through training and inspiring them for civic and social service.... The Church has no occasion to apologise for taking an active interest in municipal affairs. She is bound to do so, in discharging her social function.⁵⁹

Referring to the physical deterioration evident in army recruits in the early 1900s, he wrote that "in order to give that manhood a proper chance we must remodel and rebuild our cities. As far as possible they must become garden cities." He wrote "Glasgow is ancient and rich and progressive, in point of population the second city of the empire, in some respects the first. Her very best sons are proud to serve her. Her administration is pure. She is inspired by lofty civic and social ideals." To implement the just society that he sought, the democratic process was critical: "One of the responsibilities of citizenship is the franchise, and to use it is a civic obligation and duty. The vote is a sacred trust."

In 1901, John Marshall Lang, by then Principal of Aberdeen University, wrote that "Christ did more than work indirectly, through the regeneration of personal character, towards the improvement of communal life. He had always in His view the formation of a society which should mirror the divine order, the Kingdom of God." Chalmers was still the inspiration in Glasgow, according to Lang, especially his

D. Watson, Chords of Memory (Edinburgh and London, 1936), 78.

D. Watson, The Churches at Work (Edinburgh, 1926), 70-1.

D. Watson, Perfect Manhood (London, 1905), 234.

D. Watson, The Church at Work, 125.

experiment at St John's. "The experiment was a success, so long as the genius and magnetic force of Dr Chalmers directed it, and so long as the after-glow of that genius and force was felt." But, he added, "Glasgow and the world have travelled far, and developed new social states, since his day." Nonetheless, he still saw much worth in Chalmers' ideas. "If the parochial system were more fully realised, if the principle of locality were made more effective, the National Churches would possess the most favourable of opportunities in a grand national movement to stub up the roots of the upas-tree of poverty." Like so many clergymen of that period, the corporation of Glasgow comes in for substantial praise, especially in relation to the construction of council houses — though Lang sought caution in disturbing the free-market system. 63

Matheson, Watson and Lang represented a widespread reevaluation of the nature of the Christian community between 1888 and 1914. Notions of social equality entered the framework of the ideal Christian community in a way never envisaged by Chalmers or his immediate successors. In this way, the civic ideal became for a short but critical period extremely influential in bringing town councils, city establishments, the churches and the labour movement to a common discussion. The first world war and the advent of "Red Clydeside" undermined this broad coalition of interests, and civic identity moved into a much more politicised phase in which the churches' contributions became rapidly marginalised.

VII

From the point in the early 1840s when it was realised that Glasgow had the worst living conditions in Britain, the godly commonwealth promoted by Chalmers simply had to be transformed. From that point a momentum for a multi-track approach to urban improvement ran almost uninterrupted during the rest of the period. However, Thomas

J.M. Lang, *The Church and Its Social Mission* (Edinburgh and London, 1902), 31-2, 151-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 192.

Chalmers' name remained a byeword for the network of civic, philanthropic and church elites as the godly commonwealth was transformed after 1843 into a civic gospel of improvement. When comparisons have been made to the more foreshortened party-based civic gospelism of Birmingham under Joseph Chamberlain, it is understandable that an historian like Iain Hutchison felt able to write that "there was no one in Glasgow to proclaim the message of a civic gospel". But the civic gospel most certainly existed there, and arguably the most matured, pioneering and potent version of it in Britain. Victorian Glasgow did not need anyone to preach a civic gospel *ab initio*, as in Birmingham in the 1850s, nor did they; clergy in the city merely worked amongst the influential to get it implemented. The ideal of a godly commonwealth was already in place in presbyterian and civic ideology, leaving only the need for it to be modernised, democratised and made workable.

Those whom Chalmers inspired came in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods to revel in electioneering, in participating in the democratic process leading to the fulfilment of the ideal urban community. With elections for town council, school board, parish council and – finally – for the local veto plebiscite (which was secured by the Temperance (Scotland) Act of 1913, but not implemented until 1920), urban social improvement came to resonate the same principles of popular election and consent as the Disruption itself; this was perhaps the one thing with which Chalmers had never come to terms. With the creation of new police burghs in the 1880s and 1890s, the ideal was replicated across Scotland in communities of 2,000 people and less, with clergy (notably of the Free Church) often emerging as provosts. Municipalisation of gas supply, the demolition and replacement of poor housing, the strict control of public houses and 'immoral' venues (including ice-cream parlours), and the creation of

I.G.C. Hutchison, "Politics and Society ...", 218-19; on Birmingham, see E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-century Urban Government (London, 1973), and A Briggs, Victorian Cities (Harmondsworth, 1971), 184. There is still a case to be explored that Glasgow clergy exported the civic gospel to Birmingham.

local educational and leisure institutes and libraries, took place in even the humblest Scottish burgh between 1890 and 1920. As Bernard Aspinwall has rightly stated: "In the generation before the first world war, Scottish identity was found not in the church, established or free, but in the town hall; in an ethical Christian community faith rather than 'churchianity'". 65

This was perhaps the final way in which Chalmers' ideal was changed. His *national* communal social ideal, based on a Scottish presbyterian consciousness, became overtaken by a *local* and *urban* social ideal, and the organisational unit of the national church was replaced by the town council and the school board. Chalmers' "principle of locality" became activated perhaps in a way he could not foresee – as a key element of Scots' identity in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. The consequence of the Disruption was not the obliteration of a national presbyterian identity because of the termination of a godly commonwealth ideal – which was already in institutional shreds; rather, the consequence was the forging of what A.L. Matheson called a "civic patriotism" that was to be potent in Scottish identity until well into the interwar period, and that was still to have considerable influence until the sweeping-away of the burghs in 1975.

B. Aspinwall, 'The Scottish religious identity in the Atlantic world 1880-1914', in *Religion and National Identity*, ed. S. Mews (Oxford, 1982), 505.

